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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KADUNA 01485

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SUBJECT: "THE NATIONAL QUESTION": CAN NIGERIANS LIVE TOGETHER?

11. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

12. SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 20 THE CITIZEN WEEKLY MAGAZINE HELD AN "ANNUAL DIALOGUE" CENTERED ON THE SUBJECT: "THE NATIONAL QUESTION: WHAT IS THE ANSWER?" CONSUL GENERAL ATTENDED THE SESSION, WHICH INCLUDED SPEAKERS KEN SARO-WIWA (ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN WRITERS); COL. (RTD) YOHANNA MADAKI; FELIX ADENAIKE (FORMER MD OF THE TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS); DR. YUSUF BALA USMAN (ABU); SAM IKOKU, VETERAN POLITICIAN; AND ALHAJI USMAN ABUBAKAR (FORMER STATE COMMISSIONER AND BUSINESSMAN). THE "NATIONAL QUESTION," BALDLY PUT, ASKS WHETHER NIGERIANS ARE ABLE TO LIVE TOGETHER IN ONE COUNTRY. IN VARIOUS WAYS, THE SPEAKERS OFFERED INSIGHTS INTO THE INTERWOVEN PROBLEMS OF ETHNICITY, RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES AND CONSTANTLY CHANGING POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS. PREDICTABLY, NO ONE HAD AN ANSWER. END SUMMARY.

13. IN THE VARIOUS PRESENTATIONS, A RECURRING THEME THE PARTICIPANTS CHEWED OVER WAS THE MULTIPLICITY OF ETHNIC GROUPS IN NIGERIA AND THE VARIOUS WAYS, SINCE COLONIAL TIMES, THE ISSUE HAS BEEN DEALT WITH. WHILE SARO-WIWA, HIMSELF AN IJAW FROM RIVERS STATE, SUPPORTED THE IDEA OF AUTONOMY FOR EACH GROUP, FEW OTHERS SAW ANY POSITIVE GAIN FROM FURTHER DIVISION ALONG ETHNIC LINES. IN FACT, SEVERAL SPEAKERS STATED EMPHATICALLY THAT THE CONTINUED CREATION OF NEW STATES HAD ENTRENCHED ETHNIC POLITICS IN NIGERIA AND INCREASED THE SENSE OF GRIEVANCE AMONG THOSE MINORITIES WHICH DID NOT YET HAVE A STATE "OF THEIR OWN."

14. THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF RELIGION WITH ETHNICITY ALSO CAME UP THROUGHOUT THE DAY. ADENAIKE, FOR EXAMPLE, URGED NIGERIANS NOT TO SHY AWAY FROM DISCUSSING ETHNIC DIFFERENCES AS IF THEY DID NOT EXIST. HE STATED FURTHER HIS CONVICTION THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO FACILITATE THE PRACTICE OF ONE'S RELIGION WITHOUT THRUSTING THE ISSUE INTO THE CENTER OF POLITICAL DISCUSSION. IN SAYING THIS, HE CAME AS CLOSE TO A DEFINITION OF SECULARISM AS WE HAVE HEARD IN NIGERIA.

15. DR. BALA USMAN CONCENTRATED HIS LEGENDARY FIRE ON EXPLODING SEVERAL MYTHS OR "FAIRY TALES" WHICH HE SAID INFORMED MOST DISCUSSIONS OF THIS KIND, INCLUDING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE THREE SPEAKERS WHO HAD PRECEDED HIM. HE STATED IT WAS SILLY TO THINK OF ETHNIC GROUPS PRIOR TO BRITISH CONQUEST OF HAVING EXISTED WITHIN CLEARLY DRAWN POLITICAL BOUNDARIES, ONE TO EACH GROUP. FURTHER HE POINTED OUT THAT THE BRITISH TAKEOVER OF WHAT IS NOW NIGERIA HAD BEEN GREATLY FACILITATED BY THE DIVISIONS AND ANIMOSITIES AMONG THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND DID NOT OCCUR SIMPLY THROUGH FORCE MAJEURE. FINALLY, SAID BALA USMAN, THE SIMPLISTIC DISCUSSION OF POLITICS UNDER THE FIRST REPUBLIC IN WHICH EACH OF THE THREE REGIONS HAD HAD ITS OWN PARTY BASED ON ITS ETHNIC GROUP WAS ALSO ABSURD. ETHNIC SOLIDARITY HAS NEVER EXISTED IN NIGERIA, MAINTAINED BALA USMAN, BEFORE, DURING OR AFTER THE BRITISH, NOR HAVE POLITICAL BOUNDARIES EVER COINCIDED WITH ETHNIC BOUNDARIES THERE IS ALSO NO SUCH THING, HE SAID, AS "RELIGIOUS POLITICS," MAINTAINING THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST 12 MUSLIM POLITIES IN NORTHERN NIGERIA AND NO SUCH THING AS "THE HAUSA-FULANI." BALA USMAN'S CONCLUSION WAS THAT, SINCE ALL THESE INTERPRETATIONS OF ETHNICITY ARE "FAIRY TALES," THE ONLY ANSWER TO THE NATIONAL QUESTION IS FOR NIGERIANS TO LIVE WITHIN ONE POLITICAL ENTITY AND WORK

OUT A WAY TO DO THIS PEACEFULLY.

¶6. SAM IKOKU APPEARED TO AGREE WITH BALA USMAN ON ESSENTIALS, STATING THAT THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION IS "HOW DO WE LIVE TOGETHER HAPPILY?" HE STATED THAT THE SOLUTION CANNOT BE FOUND IN THE AMERICAN EXAMPLE (KILLING OFF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION) OR IN THE EUROPEAN EXAMPLE (KILLING OFF EACH OTHER). NEVERTHELESS, HE URGED NIGERIAN NOT TO LOOK AT TODAY'S SITUATION IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA AND THE FORMER USSR, BUT RATHER IN AMERICA WHERE THE CURRENT RESIDENTS DO LIVE TOGETHER IN HARMONY. FOR IKOKU, THE NIGERIAN STATE MUST ASSERT ITSELF TO GUARANTEE THE ESSENTIAL RIGHTS OF PEOPLE OVER ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS, AND IN PARTICULAR THE RIGHT OF PEOPLE TO LIVE AND WORK WHERE THEY ARE.

¶7. COMMENT: TO AN AMERICAN LISTENER, THE DISCUSSION WAS INTERESTING IN HIGHLIGHTING TWO AREAS IN WHICH NIGERIA DIVERGES MOST SHARPLY FROM AMERICAN PRACTICE. ONE IS WHAT APPEARS TO US IN THE NORTHERN HEARTLAND AS A COMPLETE INCOMPREHENSION ABOUT WHAT A SECULAR SOCIETY INVOLVES AND, OFTEN, WHY IT MIGHT BE DESIRABLE. THE SECOND IS WHAT IKOKU REFERRED TO, NAMELY, AN UNDERSTANDING THAT A CITIZEN CAN PRACTICE HIS CIVIC RIGHTS AND DUTIES WHEREVER HE FINDS HIMSELF. IN NORTHERN NIGERIA, AT LEAST, THE MOSLEM HAUSA ELITE EITHER CANNOT OR WILL NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT SECULARISM INVOLVES; IN FACT, MOST OF THEM WOULD REJECT IT OUT OF HAND. IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE CONSUL GENERAL RECENTLY, ALHAJI ISA KAITA REPORTED THAT THE GOVERNOR OF KANO HAD CONTRIBUTED TO A FUND TO REBUILD THE JNI CENTER BURNED DOWN IN THE KADUNA MAY RIOTS. HE WAS BLANKLY UNCOMPREHENDING WHEN THE CG ASKED IF A LIKE AMOUNT WAS TO BE CONTRIBUTED TO THE CHURCHES DESTROYED AT THE SAME TIME. "OH, NO," REPLIED THE VENERABLE ELDER, "ONLY THE MOSLEM GOVERNORS ATTENDED THE MEETING."

¶8. COMMENT (CONT): HAD WE PRESSED THE POINT TO ISA KAITA AND POINTED OUT THAT MANY CHRISTIANS LIVE IN KANO STATE AS WELL AS THROUGHOUT THE NORTH, WE SUSPECT HE WOULD FALL BACK ON THE POSITION MANY EXPRESSED IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE KANO RIOTS LAST OCTOBER AND THE KADUNA TROUBLES IN MAY: THEY ARE "STRANGERS" WHO MAY LIVE HERE IN PEACE BUT SHOULD NOT OVERSTEP THE "BOUNDS OF HOSPITALITY." IN THE ZANGON-KATAF EXAMPLE, OF COURSE, THE ARGUMENT WAS TURNED AGAINST THE HAUSAS WHO WERE CALLED STRANGERS BY THE KATAF. IN NIGERIA, IT SEEMS, YOU HAVE FULL CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS ONLY IN THAT PLACE WHERE YOU "COME FROM," WHICH, TRANSLATED, MEANS YOUR ETHNIC GROUP OR SUB-GROUP. IT FOLLOWS, THEN, THAT YOU MUST HAVE YOUR OWN PLACE AND, IN MODERN PARLANCE, YOUR "OWN" STATE. IT HAS ONLY RECENTLY BECOME APPARENT TO THE CG THAT NIGERIANS BELIEVE THIS PRINCIPLE UNDERLINES THE EXISTENCE OF 50 STATES IN THE U.S. AND, THEREFORE, EXPLAINS WHY SO MANY NIGERIANS STATE THAT SINCE THEIR SYSTEM IS MODELED ON THE U.S., THEY NEED TO HAVE 50 STATES AS WELL.

¶9. COMMENT (CONT): WHAT WAS REFRESHING AT THIS CONFERENCE WAS THE DISCUSSION OF THESE ISSUES WHICH ARE SO OFTEN SWEEPED UNDER THE CARPET IN NIGERIA. THE AUDIENCE HAD A FAIR NUMBER OF BUSINESS, ACADEMIC AND MEDIA LEADERS, AND THE CITIZEN WILL SURELY CARRY MANY OF THE PAPERS IN WHOLE OR PART. SINCE MOST SPEAKERS DISAGREED WITH EACH OTHER EVEN ON WHAT THE "NATIONAL QUESTION" IS, HOWEVER, IT WAS NO SURPRISE THAT THEY COULD NOT COME UP WITH AN ANSWER IN THE TIME ALLOTTED. END COMMENT.

WEINLAND